

Message Text

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22 10

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2114

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 7543

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MY

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER RAZAK'S ILLNESS

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 7414 (190848Z DEC 75) NOTAL

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

1. THE SUDDEN DEPARTURE OF PRIME MINISTER TUN RAZAK FOR EUROPE
DEC 17 AND CANCELLATION OF HIS PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED OFFICIAL VISIT
TO BANGKOK HAS RESULTED IN SPECULATION IN GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS
CIRCLES REGARDING THE ACTUAL CONDITION OF HIS HEALTH. FAILURE OF
GOM TO PROVIDE MEDIA WITH MORE THAN THE BAREST WORD OF HIS DEPARTURE
AND LACK OF SUBSEQUENT NEWS OF HIS CONDITION OR WHEREABOUTS HAVE
STIMULATED RUMORS THAT HE MIGHT HAVE TO STEP DOWN AS PRIME MINISTER.
THESE RUMORS HAVE BEEN REINFORCED BY FACT HE LEFT WITHOUT HIS
WIFE AND WITH ONLY TWO AIDES AND IS NOT EXPECTED BACK TILL MID-
JANUARY (SEE REFTEL). FAILURE OF GOM TO EXPLAIN HIS ABSENCE TO
PEOPLE WAS CRITICIZED BY FORMER PM TENGKU ABDUL RAHMAN DEC 29 IN HIS
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WIDELY READ COLUMN IN THE "PENANG STAR." LATEST EDITION OF

"FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW" (JAN 2) CARRIES ARTICLE BY LOCAL CORRESPONDENT DAS RAISING POSSIBILITY RAZAK HAS "UNDIAGNOSED MALIGNANCY," NOTING THAT DEPUTY PM DATUK HUSSEIN ONN IS SUFFERING FROM HEART CONDITION, AND POINTING TO TWO POWERFUL MALAY POLITICIANS IN THE WINGS, TUN MUSTAPHA OF SABAH AND SELANGOR CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HARUN IDRIS, BOTH OF WHOM HAVE RECENTLY TANGLED WITH RAZAK. REVIEW HAS CONSIDERABLE CIRCULATION HERE AND, IN ABSENCE OF AUTHORITATIVE LOCAL NEWS OF RAZAK, DAS ARTICLE HAS CAUSED FURTHER STIRRING IN THE DOVECOTS OF MALAYSIAN POLITICS.

2. WE DO NOT HAVE ACCURATE INFORMATION REGARDING RAZAK'S HEALTH EXCEPT AS REPORTED REFTEL. HOWEVER, HIS SUDDEN DEPARTURE SEEMS TO HAVE TRIGGERED HIGH LEVEL UMNO MANUEVERING FOR A POSSIBLE SUCCESSION. ACCORDING TO A GENERALLY RELIABLE PRESS SOURCE DEC 30, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY ABDULLAH MAJID TOLD HIM DEC 29 THAT RAZAK'S CONDITION IS SUCH THAT HE ACTUALLY WILL NOT RETURN UNTIL THE END OF FEBRUARY UNLESS SOME SORT OF CRISIS FORCES HIM HOME. (FYI: UK HEAD OF CHANCERY TOLD EMBOFFS DEC 30 THAT RAZAK IN LONDON DEC 22 BUT UK HICOM BELIEVES HE NOW BACK IN FRANCE. LONDON VISIT NOT PLANNED TILL AFTER ARRIVAL IN NICE BUT THAT MEDICAL "COMPLICATIONS" NECESSITATED GOING TO LONDON FOR FURTHER EXAMINATIONS. END FYI.) ABDULLAH REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE UMNO LEADERSHIP HAS COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT RAZAK IS NOT CAPABLE OF CONTINUING AS PM WHICH AS SET OFF MANY VIBRATIONS INCLUDING A SERIES OF VISITS TO UMNO BRANCHES BY THE LEADING CANDIDATE TO REPLACE HIM (PRESUMING THE DEPUTY PM ALSO IS FORCED OUT BY HIS HEART CONDITION) MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT GHAFAR BABA, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL FRONT. FIRST IN LINE TO SUCCEED DATUK HUSSEIN AS DPM IS THE PRESENT MINISTER OF EDUCATION DR. MAHATIR BIN MOHAMED WHILE PETRONAS CHIEF TUNKU RAZALEIGH HAMZAH IS FAVORED TO TAKE OVER HUSSEIN'S FINANCE PORTFOLIO. NEITHER ABDULLAH MAJID NOR OUR PRESS SOURCE SEEMED TO FEEL THAT TUN MUSTAPHA AND DATUK HARUN WERE ACTUAL CONTENDERS FOR TOP JOBS, ALTHOUGH OUR SOURCE DID NOT RULE THEM OUT AS IMPORTANT FORCES BEHIND THE SCENES. OUR SOURCE ALSO COMMENTED THAT GHAFAR'S TRIP SEEMS TO BE DIRECTED TOWARD NEUTRALIZING HARUN'S CURRENT, WELL PUBLICIZED EFFORTS TO WIN SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY IN THE NORTHERN STATES IN KEDAH AND KELANTAN.

3. WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT IS IN THE
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OFFING. IT IS BECOMING CLEARER, HOWEVER, THAT THE POSSIBILITY IS BEING CONSIDERED IN UMNO POLITICAL CIRCLES AND PEOPLE ARE BEGINNING TO POSITION THEMSELVES IN CASE A CHANGE OCCURS. WE SHOULD CLOSE BY NOTING, HOWEVER, THAT RAZAK HAS TENACIOUSLY PROTECTED HIS POWER IN THE PAST.

4. FYI: AS THIS BEING TYPED, WE RELIABLY INFORMED RAZAK'S WIFE AND OLDEST SON DEPARTED DEC 24 TO JOIN HIM IN FRANCE. THERE IS ALSO

RUMOR THAT RAZALEIGH HAMZAH LEFT WITH THEM. END FYI.
UNDERHILL

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